DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 444 932 SO 032 179

AUTHOR	Otten, Evelyn Holt
TITLE	Character Education. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Bloomington, IN.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-SO-2000-7
PUB DATE	2000-09-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0016
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 2805 East Tenth Street, Suite 120, Bloomington, IN 47408. Tel: 800-266-3815 (Toll Free). For full text: http://www.indiana.edu/~ssdc/eric_chess.htm.
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Attitude Change; Citizenship Education; *Community Involvement; Culture Conflict; Curriculum Enrichment; Elementary Secondary Education; Service Learning; Social Studies; *Student Attitudes; Student Improvement; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS	*Character Education; ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Interest in character education is reemerging in light of apparent increases in disaffected students, school violence, voter apathy, declining test scores, and disinterest in community involvement. Character education integrated into the school community is a strategy to help re-engage students, deal with conflict, keep students on task in the learning environment, and reinvest the community with active participation by citizens in political and civic life. This ERIC digest explores: (1) the various definitions of and approaches to character education; (2) divergent points of view on character education in the schools; and (3) sample character education programs. (Cites five sample program Web sites.) (BB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 444 932

Character Education. ERIC Digest.

Otten, Evelyn Holt .

ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Bloomington, IN.

SO 032 179

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC Digest
Clearinghouse for Social Studies/ Social Science Education

2805 EAST TENTH STREET • SUITE 120
INDIANA UNIVERSITY
BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA 47408
812-855-3838 • 800-266-3815

EDO-SO-2000-7 September 2000

Character Education

By Evelyn Holt Otten

Imagine the following school scenario. All participants are treated with respect and valued as human beings. The school is a warm, welcoming environment with student work displayed prominently throughout. Smiling staff greet newcomers and call students by their first names. The usual hubbub of learning is present but it is conversational and polite. Students are responsible for their behavior, and teachers model expectations for behavior to reinforce positive social attitudes. Community members are valued for more than just monetary support and offer learning laboratories for the students. Parents are active partners in more than just "back to school" activities; they participate in their children's lives and learning. Does this description sound "Pollyannaish"? Is this scenario unachievable? Such a scenario is reality in many schools with a character education program.

This ERIC Digest explores (1) the various definitions of and approaches to character education; (2) divergent points of view on character education in the schools; and (3) sample character education programs.

Definitions and Approaches. "Character education" is an umbrella term used to describe many aspects of teaching and learning for personal development. Some areas under this umbrella are "moral reasoning/cognitive development"; "social and emotional learning"; "moral education/virtue"; "life skills education"; "caring community"; "health education"; "violence prevention"; "conflict resolution/peer mediation" and "ethic/moral philosophy" (Character Education Partnership 1999, 3). As indicated by the variety of terms associated with it, character education is broad in scope and difficult to define precisely.

Character education treats various aspects of moral education, civic education, and character development. Its multi-faceted composition makes character education a difficult concept to address in schools. Each component provides a slightly different slant on what is important, and what should be taught.

Moral education addresses ethical dimensions of the individual and society and examines how standards of right and wrong are developed. Ancient philosophies and religions provide the foundations for moral discussions and ethical considerations about restoration of virtues to the schools (McClellan 1992).

Civic education provides opportunities for active involvement in the democratic processes of the school and community. A knowledge base includes principles and values of democracy from which students examine their civil rights and responsibilities and participate in the local community for the public good. Civic dispositions, characteristics of the good citizen in a democracy, are examined and emphasized in both classroom-based lessons and extra-curricular activities.

Character development is a holistic approach that connects the moral dimension of education to the social and civic realms of students' lives. Basic attitudes and values of the society are identified and reinforced in the school and community. Those who say schools do not reinforce social values have failed to examine the underpinnings of the educational system and its expectations. Education is value-laden, as the society determines what will or will not be modeled. Morals are "caught, not taught," and "classroom life is saturated with moral meaning that shapes students' character and moral development" (Ryan 1996, 75).

In character education, the school community identifies the core values of the school and works to teach and reinforce those shared values within the students' lives. Consensus must be reached to develop the shared vision of what character traits should be fostered (Haynes 1994). Those character traits should permeate the child's learning environment, whether in the classroom, hallway, gymnasium, cafeteria, sports arena, or local restaurant. The character traits are part of the fabric of the whole community, and all stakeholders model the desired behaviors.

Character education is often introduced into the classroom through the study of heroes and heroines. Students examine the character traits personified in the heroes and heroines. Yet such study is only one part of the whole of character education when it is infused into the school community's ethos. "To become grounded in basic values, students must see good examples in all aspects of school life and be taken seriously" (Black 1996, 29).

Divergent Points of View. The inclusion of character education is often a thorny issue for schools. Critics raise questions about "whose values" are to be taught. Some critics consider character education to be indoctrination in values contrary to those taught at home. If the selected values, however, are outcomes of decisions involving all stakeholders in the school community, then they should not conflict with those taught at home.

Another criticism is that character education has no "substantive" quality and does little to improve scores on standardized tests. How do we know if it is working? What about performance on those high-stakes tests?

Many schools with successful character education programs have observed fewer disciplinary referrals for misbehavior, improved school attendance, fewer student drop-outs, and higher performance scores on standardized achievement tests (Wynne and Ryan, 1997). If schools become welcoming, supportive places for students, students are more likely to attend and stay on task. Student achievement is likely to improve.

Evelyn Holt Otten is the Consultant for Service Learning and Character Education with the Indiana Department of Education. She is past Executive Director of the Indiana Council for the Social Studies (ICSS) and currently serves on the ICSS Board of Directors.

Sample Programs. Numerous programs exist for character education. These models offer a variety of approaches that may be modified for the local school community. The following examples are a sampling of worthy programs.

Character Counts! <www.charactercounts.org> is a voluntary partnership which supports character education nationally. The six pillars of character identified by the coalition include respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, fairness, and citizenship. A variety of resource materials are available, along with training sessions and awards recognition.

The Giraffe Project <www.giraffe.org> challenges participants to "stick their necks out" for good character. The program offers examples of heroes who "stuck their necks out" for the care and concern of others. Students explore the difference between "hero" and "celebrity" and work toward developing a caring local community. Resource materials are available for students in K-12.

The Character Education Partnership <www.character.org> was founded in 1993 as a national nonpartisan coalition for character education. The CEP recognizes National Schools of Character which serve as models of exemplary character education practice in the country.

Over 30 states in the United States have received U.S. Department of Education character education state grants. Sixteen states have legislation regarding character education. In 1995 the Indiana General Assembly passed a mandate for good citizenship education and delineated 13 character qualities necessary for Indiana Citizens, described at <ideanet.doe.state.in.us/charactered/instruction.html>. This legislation was a restatement of similar passages of statutes enacted in 1937 and 1975 (Indiana Department of Education, 1999, xvii). To accomplish the objectives of the legislation, the Indiana Department of Education created *Partners for Good Citizenship: Parents, Schools, Communities*. The guide is intended as a resource for all stakeholders working on effective character education.

Service learning is a vehicle for character education that actively involves students in addressing real community needs while allowing them to experience direct academic ties with the classroom. Service learning is mandated in some states for high school graduation and is optional in others. Several states have service-learning projects funded by the Corporation for National Service <www.cns.gov>, which was created under the National Community Service Trust Act in 1993.

Conclusion. Character education has long been a part of the educational scene, but interest in it is reemerging in light of apparent increases in disaffected students in school, school violence, voter apathy, declining test scores, and disinterest in community involvement. Character education integrated into the school community is a strategy to help re-engage our students, deal with conflict, keep students on task in the learning environment, and reinvest the community with active participation by citizens in political and civic life.

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available from EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from commercial reprint services.

Black, Susan. "The Character Conundrum." AMERICAN SCHOOL BOARD JOURNAL 183 (December 1996): 29-31. EJ 540 773.

Character Education Partnership. CHARACTER EDUCATION: A NATIONAL MOVEMENT CREATING SCHOOLS THAT FOSTER ETHICAL, RESPONSIBLE, AND CARING YOUNG PEOPLE (QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS). Washington, DC: Character Education Partnership, 1999.

Haynes, Charles C. "Character Education in the Public Schools." In FINDING COMMON GROUND: A FIRST AMENDMENT GUIDE TO RELIGION AND PUBLIC EDUCATION, edited by Charles C. Haynes. Nashville, TN: Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, 1994. ED 379 743.

Indiana Department of Education. PARTNERS FOR GOOD CITIZENSHIP: PARENTS, SCHOOLS, COMMUNITIES. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana Department of Education, 1999.

Lickona, Thomas. EDUCATING FOR CHARACTER: HOW OUR SCHOOLS CAN TEACH RESPECT AND RESPONSIBILITY. New York: Bantam Books, 1991. ED 337 451.

McClellan, B. Edward. SCHOOLS AND THE SHAPING OF CHARACTER: MORAL EDUCATION IN AMERICA. Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 1992. ED 352 310.

Ryan, Kevin. "Character Education in the United States." JOURNAL FOR A JUST AND CARING EDUCATION 2 (January 1996): 75-84. EJ 521 443.

Schaeffer, Esther F. "It's Time for Schools to Implement Character Education." NASSP BULLETIN 83 (October 1999): 1-8. EJ 594 838.

Wynne, Edward, and Kevin Ryan. RECLAIMING OUR SCHOOLS: TEACHING CHARACTER, ACADEMICS, AND DISCIPLINE. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-99-CO-0016. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated.